

**CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
WESTERN AVENUE RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE #6, June 17, 2010
MEETING NOTES**

Date, Time & Place: June 17, 2010, 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Cambridge Senior Center

Present

Committee Members

Kathy Cannon	Marc Leuchner	Abdullah Daoud
Reuben Dottin	Caitlin Gallagher	Marvin Gilmore
Eran Segev	Anne Shuhler	Artis Spears

City of Cambridge

Susanne Rasmussen (CDD)	Jeff Rosenblum (CDD)	Lillian Hsu (CAC)
Brent Ryan (PAC)	Jeremy Weeks (CAC)	

*CDD = Community Development Department CAC = Cambridge Arts Council
PAC = Public Art Commission*

Consultant Team:

Jerry Friedman (HDR Engineering, Inc.)

Public (signed in)

none

*****SEE ALSO POWERPOINT SLIDES OF PRESENTATION*****

Note: Q=Question A=Answer C= Comment

1. WELCOME (Susanne Rasmussen)

Susanne welcomed the attendees, reviewed the agenda, and introduced City and Consultant staff.

2. PUBLIC ART COMPONENT (Lillian Hsu)

Lillian spoke about the public art component of the Project.

- The artist selection process occurs first. An Arts Jury will look at slide portfolios from various artists in the CAC roster who are interested in public art, and select three finalists.
- The jury would like to be informed about what aspects of Western Avenue are important to the Advisory Committee; and what aspects might therefore be important to reflect in public art.
- Public art is very broadly defined, and can range from stand-alone pieces to pieces which are more integrated throughout a streetscape or site.
- There have been about 150 pieces of art installed across the City since 1979.
- Some examples include:
 - “Multicultural Manifesto”: The brass cylinders located in Central Square which are inscribed with residents dreams in many languages
 - The Mosaic at the Central Square library, which reflects the history of the Square
 - The mural at the Green Street Garage
 - Sculpture located in the “pocket park” near Franklin Street
 - A lighting system at the East Cambridge Police Station which is tied into the emergency response system.

- An endowment given to the High School to promote student-generated art

Questions/Comments:

Q: What is the budget for art for Western Avenue? What was the budget for the art installation at Palmer Street in Harvard Square and other locations?

A: The budget is \$100,000 for Western Avenue. The police station art was about \$150,000; Franklin Street approx. \$150,000. Palmer Street was about \$300,000, but that includes both City and private contributions, since it is integrated into both public and private space.

Q: Isn't the budget supposed to be around 1% of the project cost?

A: This is typically only calculated based on the surface component of the project, not including the subsurface.

Q: Where could art be located on a long roadway like Western Avenue?

A: It depends on what the neighborhood is interested in. The artist will come up with responsive ideas. Brookline Street is an example of art that was integrated throughout a corridor.

C: Would like to see something that is integrated the full length of Western Avenue; and that equally engages pedestrians, drivers, and cyclists. Should capture the "motion of the street".

Q: How is maintenance handled?

A: The Arts Council has a conservator program, and also assess the condition of the art installations every year. Some pieces (such as the police station lighting) have operating costs.

- When an artist is on-board, he or she will talk to the Committee about these specifics, but first the Jury needs to select 3 finalists. Advisory Committee members are invited to be involved in the final selection by the Jury by joining the meetings of the Jury.

C: Because Western Ave will be totally dug up as part of the project, perhaps something that literally comes out of the ground could be recycled into the artwork.

Q: The artist candidates don't have first-hand experience of Western Avenue. How will this work out?

A: One important criteria will be selecting an artist who is willing and interested in learning about the history of the site.

Q (from Lillian): What kind of experience of Western Avenue would the Committee like to see enhanced by the art installation?

Answers from Committee:

- History and diversity of people's backgrounds in this neighborhood. Western Avenue is unique among the City's neighborhoods in that regard.
- The constant evolution of Western Ave and the neighborhood. Would not like to see something that is just a snapshot of a particular era in history.
- Should be something that guides people towards businesses as well as the Charles River.
- Connection to the sounds of life
- Can help calm traffic
- Should be super-creative; really different
- The old animated signs on River Street were something that really enlivened the street as a Gateway. That experience is missing today.
- Something bright, attracts attention of drivers, reminds them that people live here
- Should draw people down from Mass Ave to check it out.
- Could help activate the park across from the former Police Station
- Should send message that there are things to do along Western Avenue – not just a thoroughfare

- Should reflect today and into the future
- Should give people a good feeling as they leave Cambridge.
- This has all been very good input. We will schedule a meeting with the full Jury since the Committee is definitely interested in being a full part of the selection process.

3. CONCEPTUAL DESIGN ALTERNATIVES (Jerry Friedman / Jeff Rosenblum)

Want to review the process to date. At last meeting, we presented 5 concepts. After receiving Advisory Committee feedback, as summarized in the notes from the previous meeting, we have begun the detailed assessment of these concepts in terms of real world operating and maintenance concerns, including snow-clearance, emergency service access, etc. Following is a list of the criteria being used to evaluate the concepts:

- Traffic calming effect / vehicle speed reduction
- Pedestrian crossing safety
- Expanded sidewalk space for walking and sitting
- Bicycle facility safety and comfort
- Bus operations and efficiency
- Rush hour vehicle capacity
- Parking availability
- Maintenance operations, such as snow clearance and street cleaning
- Emergency vehicle access
- Innovative design
- Construction cost
- Community support

As a recap:

General:

- On all concepts we are proposing that at bus stops, the sidewalks be extended right to the edge of the travel or bike lane. This makes it much easier for buses to pull into and out of stops; and makes it easier for passengers, especially those with mobility issues, to get on and off the buses.

Concept 1:

- Basically existing conditions with two travel lanes, two parking lanes, and a bicycle lane. Exact lane dimensions could be modified somewhat from existing in order to narrow the travel lanes and widen the bike lane, and widen the sidewalk by a few feet.

Concept 2:

- This concept keeps existing curb-to-curb width of 45-feet, but uses some of the extra space which today exists to create a street-level cycle track behind the parking lane.
- A flush buffer is provided between the parking lane and the cycle track.
- At bus stops, the cycle track would climb to sidewalk level, and special markings and signage would be provided to remind cyclists to slow down.
- This configuration of cycle track minimizes instances of cyclists being “doored” by parked cars.

Concept 3:

- This concept starts to narrow the roadway width. A raised cycle track is provided, and the curb-to-curb width becomes about 36 feet. Still two lanes of traffic, and two parking lanes. No “in-street” bike accommodation, though cyclists are never prohibited from using the roadway..

- Cyclists are separated from pedestrians by the existing buffer of trees and lights, and additional buffer space is provided to protect cyclists from dooring by parked cars, and from trees, lights and other street furniture elements.
- Sidewalk width remains the same as existing, which is about 10 feet (including trees, etc.)

C: Confused by depiction of bus shelter relative to sidewalk and cycle track width.

A: These renderings are not meant to be realistic in terms of all of the details, more the overall concept. There are still details to be worked out during final design.

C: Would like to see bus stop treatments like those along Beacon Street in Brookline. Nice waiting areas with plantings, flowers, etc. Would be even better if could remove parking from north side of street.

Q: If this were a 2-way street, there could be a pair of cycle tracks like on Vassar Street. Will this design encourage 2-way travel? Can you fit in a 2-way cycle track?

A: There is no room for a formal 2-way cycle track. Some people will undoubtedly travel the “wrong-way” on this facility; however, if the Western-to-River segment of the Memorial Drive path can be improved, this will encourage bikes to use the eastbound bike lane on River Street.

Q: Are there City/State ordinances regarding snow clearance from cycle tracks?

A: No. But snow clearance is a very important issue that the city is considering.

Concept 4:

- This is a “one travel lane” concept, which could be implemented from Mass. Ave. to Gilmore Street (with 2 lanes from Gilmore Street to Memorial Drive).
- It is a radical change, but would bring significant benefits for traffic calming, pedestrian safety, and neighborhood livability.

Q: Has City made similarly radical changes elsewhere?

A: Yes – When Central Square was reconstructed, one travel lane was removed, but the street carries the same amount of traffic before and after, just that traffic flows more slowly yet consistently.

Concept 5:

- This is a “one travel lane” concept, with reverse angle parking on the south (left) side of the street.
- Some extra width is provided in the cross-section for parking maneuvers, and the south sidewalk is widened by a few feet to allow for vehicles to overhang the curb without hitting existing trees, etc.
- As in Concept 4, a single travel lane and bike lane are provided, and must be wide enough (18 feet) to also serve as an emergency corridor.

4. CONCEPTS FOR “UPPER” AND “LOWER” SECTIONS

- Project scope:
 - Reminder that the scope of the project is from Franklin Street to Memorial Drive. Construction in the section from Mass. Ave. to Franklin Street is not included in the project scope. Nevertheless, the design process for the project includes some development of a conceptual design for the upper portion of Western Ave. so as to ensure a consistent design.
- Mass Ave to Green Street:
 - This operates as a single lane today, though occasionally used as 2 lanes. This concept would formalize the one-lane operation and add a bicycle lane.
 - There would be some additional space left-over which could be used, in the future, to widen the sidewalk.

- This concept also proposes to move the bus stop currently east of Green Street, down to the next block. This opens up some potential efficiency in bus operations. Right now, the existing stop at Green and Magazine is extremely crowded.

- Green Street to Franklin Street

- Though this area is beyond the limits of the current project's budget, we wanted to show some possibilities, so that we make sure we don't preclude them in future.
- Continues the concept of only having one travel lane in this "upper" section. No matter what concept is chosen for beyond Pleasant Street, our traffic analyses show that from Mass. Ave. to Pleasant Street, only one lane is needed.
- Bus stop from above is proposed to move to the side of the former Police Station. Could work well with whatever public use is made of that building.

C: This also happens to be a school bus stop.

- Our initial design principal for this area was to enlarge the existing green spaces as much as possible, both the former "gas tank" park behind the Police Station; and the open space in the middle between River and Western.
- These concepts would be compatible with any of the overall concepts 1-5.

C: Would have to figure out whether enlarging those green spaces is worth it, or if some of the widening could "split the difference" on both sides of the street. The middle green space is really inaccessible for anything at present.

- Franklin Street to Pleasant Street

- Continues with the concept of only one travel lane east of Pleasant.
- Enlarges Cronin Park to the extent possible; and narrows Franklin Street so that Cronin and the "gas tank" park are more functionally connected.
- Squares-off Pleasant Street, to slow cars and improve conditions crossing Pleasant at Western.

C: Would prefer to move the Western Ave crosswalk, further to the west so as to minimize parking impacts.

- Putnam Avenue

- Provides a wider sidewalk/shorter crosswalk near Western Front, but still would allow southbound cars on Putnam to fit two-abreast as they approach Western.

- Memorial Drive

- We have determined that only 3 vehicle lanes are needed, not 4 as at present. This allows for either a bike lane, or cycle track, to reach all the way to Memorial Drive.
- Final design would need to be coordinated with MassDOT Western Avenue Bridge design.